DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 140 959 PS 009 342

AUTHOR Wulf, Kathleen M.; Bartenstein, Evelyn
TITLE An Attempt at Parent Education Through a Lecture-Discussion Series.
PUB DATE [75]
NOTE 15p.

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Child Rearing; *Discussion (Teaching Technique); Group Experience; *Lecture; *Middle Class Mothers; *Parent Education; *Teaching Techniques

ABSTRACT

This pilot study examined a lecture/discussion approach toward educating upper middle class mothers in child rearing. Mothers ranged in age from 24-45, their children from 1-14 years. Five lectures were given over a 5-week period. Topics included: (1) how a parent can contribute to the growth of a child's intelligence; (2) how language develops in early childhood; (3) newest research on infancy; and (4) the part a parent can play in his/her child's development. An 18-item Likert-type scale was devised to determine a mother's confidence in child rearing. Results of the post-test measure were insignificant. However, the discussions following each lecture allowed mothers to freely express and share their fears and concerns regarding child rearing, and appeared to have a therapeutic effect. Judging from comments, the discussions had a positive effect on mothers in terms of "not feeling so alone" and feeling "better about themselves as mothers". (Author/MS)

****
* Documents acquired by ERIC include many informal unpublished *
* materials not available from other sources. ERIC makes every effort *
* to obtain the best copy available. Nevertheless, items of marginal *
* reproducibility are often encountered and this affects the quality *
* of the microfiche and hardcopy reproductions ERIC makes available *
* via the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). EDRS is not *
* responsible for the quality of the original document. Reproductions *
* supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made from the original. *
****

ED140959

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,
EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

An Attempt at Parent Education Through a Lecture-Discussion Series

Kathleen M. Wulf and Evelyn Bartenstein

University of Southern California

PS 009342

Abstract

A pilot study examined a new approach toward educating upper-middle-class mothers in child rearing, focusing on information in child development, rather than on training, in a lecture-discussion format. Results of a post test measure were insignificant. However, discussions ensuing from the lectures appeared to have a group dynamics component, therapeutic in nature, allowing mothers to freely express and share their fears and concerns regarding child rearing. Judging from comments, the discussions had a positive effect on mothers in terms of "not feeling so alone" and feeling "better about (themselves) as mothers." This approach lends direction for future research.

An Attempt at Parent Education Through a Lecture-Discussion Series

Kathleen M. Wulf and Evelyn Bartenstein

University of Southern California

Many investigators are interested in parent education, but relatively few have been concerned about parent attitude change specifically related to child rearing techniques. Approaches have included behavior modification, various forms of lecture-discussion or study groups, group-oriented programs such as Parent Effectiveness Training, and combinations of the latter two methods. Cable TV (Baldwin et al, 1974) and computer assisted instruction (Scanland, 1970) have also been suggested. Brocher (1975) advocated a psychoanalytic approach with parents.

Behavior modification seems effective in improving parent attitudes and parent-child relationships by improving child management skills of parents in dealing with discipline problems. However, group and lecture-oriented approaches seem to be most popular.

Parent Effectiveness Training (Gordon, 1970, 1973; Peterson, 1969), a group-oriented approach, was the preferred method in one-third of the recent studies (McWhirter and Kahn, 1974; Larson, 1972; Lillibridge, 1972; Stearn, 1971; Poppen and White, 1971; and Thompson and Patrick, 1970). Parent Effectiveness Training involves twenty-four hours of training in communications skills, enhancing communication between parent and child by training parents in active listening, problem solving, conflict resolution, and the use of "I messages." Training utilizes lectures, tapes, demonstrations, role-playing, and practice exercises at home and in class (Peterson, 1969).

Three investigators have evaluated the effectiveness of PET. Larson (1972) compared PET to an achievement-motivation program (AMP) and a discussion encounter group (DEG) in improving family communication of junior high school students and their parents. All programs were group oriented, emphasizing various aspects of small group dynamics from personal awareness and growth to the teaching of specific skills which parents could apply at home. AMP focused on the individual's strengths, his goals, values and conflicts, and strengths were enhanced through individual discovery and group reinforcement. The DEG consisted of a discussion of topics, such as dating, which could present problems to parents of teenagers. Direct-open discussion of the participants' emotions was encouraged through exercises and instruction to increase practical learning about human relationships. An assessment of parental behavior and attitudes revealed PET to be most effective overall in improving self concept, reducing parent concerns, and especially in improving participant confidence as parents and in reducing child related problems in the home. AMP was helpful in improving self concept. All seemed to benefit from group experience and felt it was worthwhile, although discussion-encounter was least effective.

Lillibridge (1972) also found that PET enhanced parent confidence and increased acceptance of their children. Stearn (1971) found that after PET, parents' attitudes toward the family became more democratic, but no relationship seemed to exist between democratic attitudes of the parents and perceived acceptance by the child.

Several researchers have suggested various types of parent education

classes. Some confusion exists, however, in attempting to categorize their approaches by method, since they use a combination of lecture, discussion, encounter and practice which focus on both cognitive and affective components of parent attitudes toward child rearing. PET, while it has a cognitive aspect, focuses mainly on producing affective change as a means for better parent-child relationships. However, other education methods attempted to compare the effectiveness of various programs.

Badger (1969) evaluated classes for disadvantaged mothers which were mother and child-centered. The mother-centered aspect concentrated on discussion and improvement of child management skills, whereas the child-centered aspect focused on materials, toys, etc. which the mother could use in interactions with her infant child for tutorial purposes. The second year program indicated that mothers' attitudes changed positively with regard to teaching their infant and become more interested or involved in paraprofessional teaching. Badger considered this a group process approach.

Runyan (1973) studied parent participation in an Adlerian oriented study group on attitudes towards their disabled children. Runyan concluded that the study group advocating democratic child-rearing practices was effective in changing parental attitudes and children's behavior both at home and at school. Again, there was possibly a strong group-dynamics component in this procedure which produced the results rather than the increased knowledge or mere discussion. Swenson (1970) also used a lecture-discussion method involving an Adlerian/Dreikurs approach to child rearing. Overall, significant positive changes in parent attitudes were not found.

Lewis (1973) found parents of mentally retarded children who participated in discussion groups significantly improved in knowledge of retardation

as well as in child rearing attitudes.

Recent studies compared group-oriented to lecture or activity-oriented approaches, concluding that group-oriented approaches seemed to be most effective for positively changing parent attitudes toward child rearing. Toto (1973) compared his group-centered approach with a lecture-centered approach involving Dreikurs' techniques on child rearing. The group approach worked best. When Shaw (1973) compared group dynamics approach with sociology class lectures, the group approach was more effective in changing the attitudes of Head Start mothers toward race. However, Clarizio (1968) found no significant differences in attitudes of Head Start mothers in either a lecture-discussion group or a group with an intensive family/counseling focus. Both groups were designed to present information and discussion of child rearing concerns and the goals of Head Start.

Wittes and Radin (1971) also used lower class mothers of preschool children in two mother education approaches: an activity-oriented approach and a lecture-discussion approach. The activity group focused on applying child management strategies via role-playing, rehearsal, using new materials and home assignments. The lecture method began as lecture-discussion but later evolved into sessions led more by the mothers and incorporating aspects of a group-dynamics approach. No significant differences were found, but closer analysis revealed that the less educated members of the activity group and the more educated in the lecture-discussion group seemed to profit most by their experiences.

Lastly, Gabel (1973) used a clinical approach to evaluate the effects of mother-education groups (discussion-encounter) on maternal child rearing attitudes separately and in conjunction with group play psychotherapy. These

mothers significantly increased their emphasis on mutual-parent-child understanding. Only partial support was found for the view that psychotherapy for children has a positive effect on maternal child rearing attitudes.

Thus, though many approaches have been used to train parents in child rearing, only PET and those involving group dynamics seem effective in producing concomitant changes in parent attitudes. Also, no studies have been designed to educate parents in child development and relate it to child rearing concerns of parents. The present investigation is a pilot study which attempted to meet this need.

The study was conducted in conjunction with a series of lectures given to mothers on issues in child development. It was the second year this lecture-discussion had been presented. The question was: Will knowledge of child development and ensuing discussions of its relevance to parent-child relationships effectively change mother feelings about child rearing and specific areas of child development, and her feelings about her role as a parent?

Subjects were upper middle class mothers who voluntarily elected to participate in a lecture series on child development given through a church nursery school. Mothers ranged in age from 24 to 45. Their children ranged in age from under one year to 14 years.

An 18 item Likert type scale was devised to determine a mother's confidence in child rearing. The items were topical, thus no combined score for the questionnaire was given. The questions, essentially cognitive in nature, tapped the mothers' confidence in her own child rearing approach, her opinion of what principles of development should or should not be implemented, and her assessment of her own knowledge of child development covered by the lectures. In addition, two semantic differential questions asking mothers to

rate their conception of the ideal parent, and themselves as parents were included in the questionnaire.

Since this was a pilot study, no control group was used. A one group pre-post test design as outlined by Campbell and Stanley (1963) was employed and limitations of such a design were noted. Three group members did not complete the post test; therefore, data is included for only 15 of the 18 original participants.

Treatment consisted of a series of five lectures given over a five week period. Topics focused on preschool development and included:

1. How can a parent contribute to the growth of a child's intelligence?
2. How does language develop in early childhood?
3. What is the newest research on infancy?
4. What part can a parent play in his child's development?

Each session was devoted to a lecture and discussion of each topic. Relevant research with appropriate references were given and outside reading was encouraged. The last session was devoted to the mothers' own concerns: hyperactivity, child rearing practices of the "super rich," the effects of divorce on children, the implications for children of the materialistic tendency in the U.S., lying, overindulgence, the nature of man and the "super mom." The lectures and discussions were led by one of the authors.

Although the lecture series began within the context of a classroom atmosphere, it evolved into a group-centered discussion. The participants became a cohesive unit where members freely made self-disclosures relating to feelings about themselves as persons and as mothers, offering support and encouragement to others. A great deal of member interaction took place. Thus, in theory, treatment involved lecture and discussion, but in practice,

as a result of the interaction, small group dynamics played a key role in the discussions and ensuing results of the study.

Because the instrument was only a crude measure of possible cognitive changes in mother attitudes due to treatment, it was felt that statistical analysis of results would be inappropriate. A preliminary analysis of pre and post test means and standard deviations for each test item revealed no significant differences between pre and post test scores. This would suggest that no cognitive changes or increase in knowledge took place due to treatment. However, mother comments following the lecture-group revealed that significant positive affect changes did occur due to the lecture series. Mother comments were extremely favorable. Many seemed to have undergone a catharsis. Evaluative comments indicated that all were glad that they had participated; that they no longer felt "so alone;" and that they were glad to know others had similar anxieties regarding themselves as women and mothers and that all had experienced similar problems with their children. Many remarked, "I feel better about myself as a mother," and that they knew more about child development which could help them deal more effectively with their children.

Comments from the first lecture series are relevant here in that they, too, give an indication of the positive effects of the treatment. In fact, mothers felt so favorably about the lecture and discussions that they wanted to continue it by organizing their own discussion group after the series ended. That the author was invited to present another lecture series, the one on which this study was based, attests to the recognized effect on the participants.

The present study supports evidence that group dynamics is the key factor in creating attitude change. It also provides some evidence that educating parents in areas of child development rather than in specific skills, may be beneficial to mothers in helping them gain confidence in themselves as mothers. Although statistical evidence was unavailable, mother comments amply pointed to the needs for continuance of further investigation of such an approach.

Future research must include several additions to the present study: 1) control groups; 2) follow-up; 3) better measuring instruments. The measuring tool used was a crude instrument to tap perceived cognitive change. It was not sensitive to changes in the mothers' knowledge. Also, it did not tap the affective component of the mother's attitudes. These, of course, were brought out by effusive comments from the mothers. They seemed to profit greatly from their experience, not only in terms of knowledge but also in terms of self-worth as mothers. They experienced catharsis and a sense of togetherness in sharing their feelings and concerns as mothers. The lectures on child development appeared to be an effective catalyst. In future studies, the affective component must be measured. Several measures could be adapted and validated: e.g., Hereford's Parental Attitude Survey (1963). In addition, observation data and self concept data can be taken. It would also be interesting to conduct a process analysis of the lecture-discussion group to determine exactly what group factors were important in creating attitude change. Was it the leader? Or the topics? Or the sharing?

In sum, though further research is definitely in order, an approach which educates parents in child development while allowing them to voice and share

concerns about implications of development for child rearing, seems to have potential for positively changing parent attitudes toward child rearing, while simultaneously improving self-concept of mothers.

References

Badger, E.D. Mothers' training program - the group process. Bethesda, Md.: ERIC Document Reproduction Service, ED032926, 1969.

Baldwin, T.F., et al. Social service delivery via cable television -- faster parent training: A field experiment, cost analysis, network design, implementation alternatives and related policy issues. Final report. Michigan State University, 1974.

Brocher, T. Group methods in parent education. International Journal of Group Psychotherapy, 1975, 25 (3), 315-322.

Campbell, D.T. & Stanley, J. Experimental and Quasi Experimental Designs for Research. Chicago: R. McNally, 1968.

Clarizio, H.F. Maternal attitude change associated with involvement in Project Head Start. Journal of Negro Education, 1968, 37 (2), 106-113.

Gabel, H.D. Effects of parent group education and group play psychotherapy on maternal child-rearing attitudes. Dissertation Abstracts International, 1973, 33 (12-B), 6077.

Gordon, T. Parent Effectiveness Training. New York: Peter H. Wyden, Inc., 1970.

Gordon, T. A new model for humanizing families and schools. Journal of the International Association of Pupil Personnel Workers, 1973, 17 (1), 17-22.

Hereford, C.F. Changing parental attitudes through group discussion. Austin, Texas: University of Texas, 1963.

Larson, R.S. Can parent classes affect family communications? School Counselor, 1972, 19 (4), 261-270.

Lewis, J. Effects of group procedures with parents of M.R. children. Mental Retardation, 1972, 10 (6), 14-15.

Lillibridge, E.M. The relationship of a parent effectiveness training program to change in parents' self-assessed attitudes and children's perceptions of parents. Dissertation Abstracts International, 1972, 32 (10-A), 5613.

McWhirter, J.J. & Kahn, S E. A parent communication group. Elementary School Guidance and Counseling, 1974, 9 (2), 116-122.

Peterson, B.G. Parent effectiveness training. School Counselor, 1969, 16 (5), 367-369.

Poppen, W.A. & White, P. Between parent and counselor. Tennessee Education, 1971, 1 (2), 16-21.

Runyan, A.G. Parent education with families of children with extreme reading problems. Dissertation Abstracts International, 1973, 33 (10-A), 5499-5500.

Scanland, F.W. An investigation of the relative effectiveness of two methods of instruction, including computer-assisted instruction, as techniques for changing the parental attitudes of Negro adults. CAI Center Technical Report, Florida State University, 1970.

Shaw, M. A study of a cognitive approach and human relations training of high school students. Dissertation Abstracts International, 1973, 34 (4-A), 1713.

Stearn, M.B. The relationship of parent effectiveness training to parent attitudes, parent behavior and child self-esteem. Dissertation Abstracts International, 1971, Vol. 32, (3-B), 1885-1886.

Swenson, S.S. Changing expressed parental attitudes toward child-rearing practices and its effect on school adaptation and level of adjustment perceived by parents. Dissertation Abstracts International, 1970, 31 (5-A), 2118-2119.

Thompson, J.M. & Patrick, R. The implications of parent effectiveness training for foster parents. Bethesda, Md.: ERIC Document Reproduction Service, ED052821, 1970.

Toto, S.E. Altering parental attitudes toward child-rearing practices and its affect on adolescent self-esteem. Dissertation Abstracts International, 1973, 34 (4-A), 1718-1719.

Wittes, G. & Radin, N. Two approaches to group work with parents in a compensatory preschool program. Social Work, 1971, 16 (1), 42-50.